

## CHAPTER 210

November 23, 2011

“Maya... What the fuck did I... screw it... I’m too tired for this shit.”

It was fairly early in the morning, or at least one would assume based on just how utterly exhausted Justin was and the strange lack of lighting in the house when Justin was awoken by the sound of glass shattering. He was going to get up and clean up whatever it was Maya had managed to break this time, but by this point he was tired of cleaning up that girl’s messes, not to mention just tired in general. He simply closed his eyes again and figured he’d deal with that shit in the morning. Hopefully Maya was smart enough not to go walking through a pool of broken shards of glass until then. She could be pretty stubborn when she wanted to be after all, and if she wanted something that required her to wade through a pool of sharp, pointy glass, she would totally do it. That concerned Justin, though in the end it seemed getting enough sleep concerned him more. And when the guy had been staying up late at night just to be sure Maya was alright, could you truly blame him? He had probably got a couple hours sleep max before Maya had woke him up by breaking all his shit, after he explicitly told her not to do anything stupid until she got her strength back nonetheless.

Justin couldn’t really see of course, what with film coating his eyes as he slowly woke, followed immediately by his eyelids closing again after deciding this shit was not worth his time today, but it didn’t really take a rocket scientist to anticipate Maya’s reaction. Feverish apologies and timidly shrinking back into her shell as she hung her head in shame at the mess she had caused. She was always like that, even back when Justin first met her. He always did find it kind of ironic that a girl who was always smoking as a teenager was so afraid of causing any kind of trouble. Hell, this was the girl who bitched out Justin for being a pussy when she first offered him a cigarette. I think she was just trying to sell this image of being a cool renegade, someone who wasn’t afraid of getting trouble. After all, everyone loved the life of the party, right? It was her way of getting people to like her, even if that wasn’t who she was. But as Justin and her grew to be friends, she gradually dropped the act over the years. She didn’t need to pretend she was someone she wasn’t around Justin from what she could tell; hell, he liked her more when she wasn’t trying to be ‘hardcore.’

In the end, he didn’t really need to guess what Maya was doing though, because before long, he suddenly felt a great weight fall upon his legs. Generally Justin tried not to take up the whole couch when he slept downstairs, but it seemed that he might not have given Maya quite as much room as she might have liked when she went to plop her ass down. She was quick to get up and readjust herself mind you, after all, no one wants to sit on their brother’s bony ass legs, but even then it was

enough to wake Justin up a second time. He opened his eyes a bit, groaning with irritation as he tried to make out the figure of Maya at the other end of the sofa. She was shaking like a phone set on a vibrate, though whether it was because the house tended to be incredibly chilly in the morning, because she was still incredibly weak, or because it seemed she was carrying a huge stack of books, Justin couldn't quite discern. What he could discern was the obvious intention behind Maya carrying around that pile of textbooks with her. Justin got that she wanted to go to school and all, but if she was this sick she wasn't going to make it in time for the exams, not to mention she barely had anytime to cover two year's worth of material. "Maya, you don't have to do that. Get some rest."

*"The test is in less than a week, I don't have time."* Maya signed off frantically as she flipped open Justin's textbooks. Justin obvious couldn't afford the books for last year, so he had planned to borrow Kanji or Rise's books for a while so that Maya could catch up on the under classmen material. Alas, he had neglected to realize they all had their finals coming up soon, so Justin was really in no position to be taking anyone's textbooks away from them. Justin just had to hope to god that his textbooks would suffice, and if not, the internet would do wonders for her. At least, he had, but the simple fact of the matter was when this girl could barely stand, she clearly couldn't be thinking with perfect clarity, right? Was that any condition to be taking a test under, where she could literally keel over onto her test at any second? Justin wasn't sure he was too comfortable with the prospect of his sister straining herself like that until they were sure she was fine, and while there had definitely been an improvement, he didn't need something to just snap and send her spiraling back into the state of illness she had been in.

"I'll try to find away to reschedule. I mean, the school board's been less than cooperative so far, but..." Justin mumbled to himself as he contemplated on the matter. He had tried on several occasions to get them to just move the test back a day or two for her to get better, but they just weren't having that shit. Surely that was a lawsuit waiting to happen, right? I mean... yeah it was technically free schooling so it might fall more under a privilege than a right, but come on. They were trying to go through the proper channels and shit happened, they should at least give Justin and his sister the benefit of the doubt. It wasn't like they were trying to abuse the system or anything after all, they had legitimate health reasons that meant they couldn't be there. And it wasn't like these were the Oscars or something, she didn't HAVE to take the test with everyone else, right? Maya simply slammed her palms against the hard outer cover of Justin's text book, having perhaps just about enough of Justin constantly telling her what to do. She was going to take that damn test, and she was going to do it whether Justin liked it or not. She wasn't going to let Justin diminish her chances of receiving a proper education.

*"Goddammit Justin, I'm taking this test and I'm going to go to school and that's final, and if you don't like it you can deal with it!"* Maya signed off frantically and angrily, a deep, almost horrifying glare stretched across her face as she snarled at

Justin. Justin was by all means caught off guard at first. Maya usually didn't snap like this unless you pushed her past her pushing point, as was evident by the time she snapped at Justin when he tried to hold her back from capturing Mitsuo, or that time he had pretty much told Maya to fuck off when she was trying to do business on Kurt's behalf. He didn't even think he did anything, and to this day I don't think he ever realized how his overprotectiveness was constricting Maya's life. In the end, he supposed it didn't matter. If she was in a pissy mood, so be it. There were easy ways to deal with someone in a bad mood; the most prominent of which was to just ignore them. And what better way to ignore someone than to just go to sleep.

"Ugh... You need to chill the fuck out." Justin grumbled before turning over on the sofa, gripping his pillow tight as he angrily shut his eyes and forced himself back to sleep. It was early in the morning and she had managed to somehow break Justin's glasses while carrying around a stack of books. I'm sorry, but if anyone here should have been pissed off it was him. And he just wasn't going to deal with this bullshit today. He simply took a deep breath as he pushed his face into his pillow, drowning out the sounds of pages flapping back and forth as his eyes fluttered close.

**"What you're suggesting is totally and utterly insane... But then, just the very fact that I'm talking to you is insane."**

The shadow walked along the dusty cobblestone pathway, making his way out to the streets as his eyes darted from window to window. He had to question his sanity as the voice rang through his head like bells, but he supposed he'd rather be happy than sane. He was sure plenty of psychopaths went on to live fulfilling lives after all. He could think of one or two that went on to succeed at their aspirations, or at least, what Justin's shadow had always perceived as that fucker's aspirations. He was always so vague, so... how you say, mysterious. None of them really knew much about the guy other than what could be inferred, so it was truly hard to say what he desired in life. But there was one thing they could say without a reason of a doubt: He was out of his goddamned mind, even by shadow standards. He was just very good at selling the illusion that he wasn't. It made you wonder... if you're sane enough to know you're insane, and sane enough to pretend to be sane... are you insane in the first place? That was the scariest part; the possibility that he was entirely sane and still willingly decided to be... monstrous. A shiver found its way down the shadow's spine as he paced his way through the streets. He wasn't sure whether to respect the man or to fear him. Perhaps both.

**"Don't you see? The humans are only a... temporary nuisance. You gotta think BIG."** The voice echoed with a mischievous giggle through the shadow's brainpan. He couldn't comprehend this at all. As a whole the idea was pretty damn stupid if not a suicide note just waiting to be signed, but the mere idea of the humans being a temporary problem? When they were the ones who controlled this

world, they were the only problem that mattered. No, Shadow Justin's vengeance would not be turned elsewhere in a vain attempt at getting himself killed. He may have been delusional, but not blind. The humans shifted this place into hell, the humans were the ones that got Maya's skull blown completely off (which for some reason she kept trying to convince the shadow was a good thing... he was a hard time believing that), the humans were the ones who held the puppet strings... And they would never be free until someone burned those strings away.

**"I gotta think logistically. You don't bite the hand that feeds, just the hand that shoves your face into the trough."** The shadow remarked with bitter sarcasm. He knew better than to question that girl after she had been right since the beginning, but all the same there were some things the voice in his head said that didn't make a lick of sense. And that only seemed to contribute to his theory that he was by all means insane. Sane enough to know he was insane, but insane all the same. He sighed a bit as he dug his hand around into his pocket and whipped out a cigarette, lighting it up quickly before taking a drag at the paper tube of toxic waste. If there was one advantage to not having lungs, it was that smoking wasn't gonna do much to you; other than maybe make your breath smell like complete and utter shit. But then, some people like that scent; kinda like how some people enjoyed the scent of oil and gasoline: you could count the shadow amongst one of those people. For a while, the shadow simply leaned a bit against a nearby street lamp, its light shining through the thick green fog oh so radiantly. In that regard, the shadow supposed it was nice to have these around, though they were ultimately useless. Just there to... brighten up a bleak world.

**"...Greetings viewers."** The sound of bussing soon pierced the sky, static shifting through the airwaves as whatever electronic device had kicked on tuned itself to whatever channel it was trying to connect to. The shadow was only slightly caught off guard by the sudden birth of electronic life, simply shrugging and taking another drag of the cigarette as he slowly made his way over to the source of the sound: a broken window in an old, worn down convenience store. It kind of looked like looters had been here at some point, though the shadow knew that was obviously not true. It was far more likely this hadn't been the first time the television had cackled to life, and some of the lesser shadows had smashed over the glass in a vain attempt at trying to get to the source of the crackling of television speakers. As for the screen, it was a sole reporter, about neck length brown hair standing there with a microphone in her hand. The shadows didn't really watch much television mind you, but when they did, this was the face they were usually greeted by. It wasn't like there was ever much news around here but when there was this was the girl to report it. Strange, you'd think there'd be more shadows for reporters, what with them all being lying sacks of shit and all. That seemed grounds to have an embodiment of suppressed emotions and what not. Any actor would, as well as any lawyer. Same thing really. I suppose it was for that reason Justin stood there in the

middle of the street, smoking his cigarette and watching television. This had to be good if it was being broadcast out of the blue like this... In a way, he was right.

**“I'm Mayumi Yamano; Channel 0 news. The story for this evening; a dead body found here in the depths of our very own city. As you know, this marks the first murder here in twelve centuries; we'll have more details on this shocking development later this evening.”** The cigarette was quick to slip from the shadow's mouth as the headline reached his ears. A dead body? Looking at the backdrop the reporter was standing against, this was San Diego alright... or at least the shadow version of it... Which meant... Oh... Oh fuck! She had found Maya's corpse, somehow somehow. The shadow backed away from the screen with horror as the reporter gave the audience one last wink and the image on screen faded away into a gargle of static and white noise.

**“Sh-She know about the body. SHIT!”** The shadow mumbled to himself, pacing around in circles as his mind practically snapped in two. Part of the reason he was still able to walk around for this year was because no one ever knew about the body, nor his connection to the murder... And if HE ever found out, perhaps he would actually start enforcing those rules of his. That would be disastrous for Justin's Shadow. How could he ever liberate this cursed land from the humans control of he was dead? All it would take is a snap of HIS fingers and the shadow would disintegrate like pollen in the wind. Perhaps he was afraid of death, perhaps he was just determined; whatever it was, his mind was slowly going to shit and back with pure frightful adrenaline. Oh yes, he had no idea what to do now that his secret was about to be broadcast all over the air... Or perhaps he knew exactly what to do and was too afraid to admit it. And that was what the other voice in his head was there to do for him.

**“What? You seriously don't know what to do?”** The voice mocked him, sarcastically and condescendingly judging his inability to see the simplest solution in front of him. In a way, what the voice in his head would go on to suggest was not all that unexpected from the shadow. I think he was only shocked to find that he had no qualms going through with it. Once was more than enough for him after all. There were some things not worth repeating under any circumstances. **“What's one more body on the pile?”**

**“You're insane. You are fucking insane.”**

**“You're the one talking to yourself... besides... I don't think you understand that you don't have a say a in the matter.”**